



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource — Employees

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Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. Sometimes, in the middle of a corrective interview, I discover that I am responsible for the performance problem of an employee. It might be due to a lack of communication, faulty instructions, or lack of follow-up. Won't I lose respect if I apologize or admit it?

A. Few things are harder than admitting fault, particularly in the middle of a corrective interview. But experienced managers know that no one was ever despised for admitting their mistakes. It is worse for your employee to walk away feeling unjustly corrected. Willingness to be open to admitting your own contribution to a problem can gain you respect and help your employee admit to his or her own role in the performance problem. It is a good practice when correcting performance to always ask yourself ahead of time whether you have some ownership in the problem. You might prevent the need for a corrective interview—which is something most supervisors don't like—or prevent having to discover your own role in the middle of the discussion.

■ Q. I am a worrywart about how management thinks my work unit is doing. Although I have been a manager for several years, I can't seem to quiet myself down enough to enjoy my job. What can I do to change? Can EAS help me?

A. Although some worry can arguably be considered a healthy and self-preserving virtue of a good manager, being in a state of excessive anxiety and distress will interfere with your ability to perform the duties of your position. Recognizing that your worrying cannot exist in isolation but will affect the employees you supervise can motivate you to gain better control over it. Your employee assistance professional can help you gain some understanding of what contributes to your worrisome state and help you locate additional resources, if needed. There are many helpful approaches including thought blocking; stress management techniques; reinterpreting the balance between reality, fears, and worry; and making sure no medical condition contributes to your anxiety.

■ Q. Our work unit's director has subtly discouraged employees from using EAS because he does not want employees to "air the laundry" of our work unit along with personal problems. This information is also confidential, correct?

A. The confidentiality of EAS records pertains not only to the identities of those who use the program and the personal information they share with employee assistance professionals, but also other information, such as sensitive issues and problems in work units, rumors, morale concerns, and more. This information is held in confidence in accordance with EAS policies and is not shared with other parts of the work organization or state. It is not unusual for a manager to be concerned about what is reported outside the work unit by employees, but managers have nothing to fear from EAS. Employee assistance professionals frequently learn about many issues of the work organization, concerns of employee work groups, trends in morale, and more. For more than 25 years, EAS has provided a safe place for managers and their employees to discuss problem areas and how to resolve them. This is what has made EAS a valued resource to all levels of state government.

■ Q. I made a supervisor referral of an employee to EAS, but I also decided to give her a written reprimand a couple of days later because there have been so many warnings. She then cancelled her EAS appointment. This clearly shows there was no personal problem, correct?

A. EAS recommends that supervisors refer employees to EAS as early as possible in the corrective action process in order to allow the employee to get help he/she may need to correct job performance deficiencies. A disciplinary action immediately following a supervisor referral can undermine the referral. Your employee probably believed there was no longer a benefit to be gained from keeping her EAS appointment after receiving the action. Most employees accept supervisor referrals to 1) prevent a disciplinary action for performance problems and to satisfy the supervisor, or 2) because they realize they need to get help with a difficult personal problem they had been trying to manage on their own. Either of these reasons can lead to the successful resolution of a personal problem and improved job performance, resulting in a win-win outcome. Making an EAS referral does not mean that disciplinary action is unwarranted. At any stage of the corrective/disciplinary action process, it is appropriate to make a referral to EAS. Consider making EAS referrals earlier to obtain the most positive outcome as quickly as possible.

■ Q. My employee came straight out and told me he had a cocaine problem. I know EAS does not do treatment, but only assessment, referral, and problem solving. Consequently, I referred him directly to a treatment program and he went. Did I do the right thing?

A. You are correct about the EAS role, but there is a lot more to it. EAS performs a comprehensive assessment, and helps determine the most effective form of treatment, coordinates follow-up and back-to-work meetings, encourages family involvement in treatment, and assists with insurance matters. Your employee may also have co-existing problems. People who are addicted to cocaine must also be assessed for other drug use, especially alcohol. Some cocaine addicts who are also addicted to alcohol have only self-diagnosed their cocaine problem. They also have a high degree of relapse without close follow-up. An employee assistance program like EAS can provide that. Such a relapse could mean losing your employee. There is also another important reason to use EAS. Referring to treatment is outside the scope of your responsibilities as a supervisor, and can place you and your organization at risk should a problem with the referral arise.

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<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

